

## QUINTUS

Quintus, the hero of our story, actually existed. His full name was Quintus Horatius Flaccus and in English he is usually called Horace. He was born on December 8, 65 BC, in Venusia, a large town in the wild area of Apulia in south-east Italy. His father, whom he loved and admired, was a freedman, somebody who had been a slave and then been given his freedom; he was an auctioneer's agent who owned a small farm. But we know nothing at all about any other relatives. We have invented the name Scintilla for Quintus' mother and given him a sister called Horatia.

In telling the story of Quintus we have made up many details. But much of our story is true. We know from his own poetry that his father did not send him to the local school – though in our story we pretend that he did go there for a while – but 'he dared to take me to Rome as a boy to be taught the arts which any father from the top levels of society would have his own sons taught'. In Rome Flaccus took him to what was perhaps the best school, that of Orbilius. After this he may have studied rhetoric, the art of public speaking, which was the usual form of tertiary education. Finally, when he was about twenty, his father sent him to the Academy in Athens, the most famous university of the ancient world, where he studied philosophy. No wonder Horace always speaks of him with gratitude and affection.

At the age of twenty-one he ended his career as a student in Athens and joined the army of Marcus Brutus, the leading assassin of Julius Caesar. Thus when he was twenty-two he fought as a military tribune – a surprisingly high rank – and even commanded a legion on the losing side in one of the bloodiest battles of the ancient world, at Philippi in north-east Greece (42 BC).

After this humiliation, he returned to Rome, became a clerk in the Treasury and started to write poetry. This led him to move in literary circles where he met Virgil, the greatest of the Roman poets. Virgil introduced him to Maecenas, one of the most powerful men of the time and a great patron of the arts. Maecenas became a close friend and presented him with a farm in the Sabine hills near Rome, and his support allowed Horace to devote himself entirely to writing poetry.



Apulia



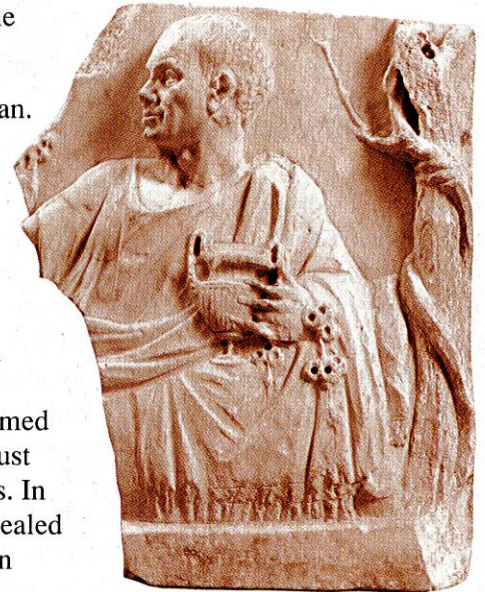
Through Maecenas, he became a friend of Augustus, the first Roman emperor, who admired his poetry and even asked him to become his private secretary. Horace refused the position, but remained on good terms with Augustus. So the son of a humble freedman from a remote part of Italy rose to become the friend of the greatest men in Rome. He owed this extraordinary success partly to his character. Maecenas undoubtedly had a deep affection for him, but it was his poetry which brought him to Maecenas' notice and his poetry which made him an influence in the Rome of Augustus.

Horace did not write a vast number of poems; in fact they fit into one slim volume. But they are highly original – they include four books of Odes, which he modelled on Greek lyric poetry, two books of Satires, in which he laughs either at himself or at the follies of his fellow men, and two books of Epistles, letters to friends in poetic form. At the end of the first set of Odes which he published, he proudly claims:

I have raised a monument more lasting than bronze and higher than the ruins of the royal pyramids. Neither biting rain nor the wild north wind nor the innumerable procession of the years can destroy it ... Not all of me shall die ... a man who became powerful from humble beginnings ...

In his poetry he tells us a good deal about himself as a man. He was, he says, short, fat and quick-tempered; the one surviving portrait of him suggests that he was not as unattractive as he claims. He had a wide circle of friends who were devoted to him and, although he never married, he had many love affairs. He is always apt to laugh at himself; for instance, he ends one epistle to a friend: 'When you want a laugh, you can visit me, fat and sleek, a pig from Epicurus' sty.' Epicurus was the philosopher who said that pleasure was the purpose of life, and Horace sometimes claimed to follow this philosophy. But Epicurus' philosophy wasn't just about enjoying life: it recommended moderation in all things. In fact it was the simple pleasures of country life that most appealed to Horace, who was happier working on his Sabine farm than living it up in Rome. He died not long after Maecenas on November 27, 8 BC, at the age of fifty-six.

What he was like as a child we can only guess, and in the first part of this course the story is fictional; but in the second part it gradually draws closer to historical fact and we hope that by the end, partly through quotations from his own poetry, a true picture of his character emerges.



Quintus Horatius Flaccus

*Horace's outlook on life can be summed up in his own words 'carpe diem, quam minimum crēdula posterō' (seize every day, giving no thought for tomorrow). What do you think about his approach to living?*